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# TRAINING PUPILS IN THE EFFECTIVE USE OF THE TEXTBOOK

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ALFRED L. HALL-QUEST  
University of Cincinnati

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Training pupils in the effective use of the textbook needs to be stressed as an educational essential. With this thesis educators are in growing agreement. If it is important to instruct pupils in the proper handling of the saw, the hammer, the lathe, the sewing-machine, and the stove, in manual training and home economics courses, it is equally important—and for the same reason—that skilful training be provided in the use of those tools necessary to the learning of the so-called “academic subjects.”

Not without good reason are adverse criticisms being raised against the dominant place occupied by the textbook in American education. These criticisms need not be discussed here. We all know them. As a result of this critical attitude, educators today insist upon a type of instruction that assigns a secondary place to the textbook. Projects and problems, clear-cut correlations between formal instruction and vital applications in the work-a-day world, are given acute accent in these times of industrial and commercial demands. This article is not intended as a brief in defense of the superiority of the textbook over the methods of organization in teaching referred to. But facts are stubborn, as we all know, and it is a fact that the text is still with us. Moreover, indications are not wanting that it is going to remain the instrument of education for a prolonged and indefinite time.

## VARIOUS FUNCTIONS OF THE TEXTBOOK<sup>1</sup>

An impartial consideration of the textbook emphasizes the further fact that here we have a means of education that functions in several directions. The textbook is quite obviously a source of knowledge, a compendium and organization of a particular group of experiences that mankind has acquired by trial and error, persistent thinking, and patient experimentation. It is also a some-

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<sup>1</sup> HALL-QUEST, *The Textbook, How to Use It and Judge It* (New York: Macmillan, 1918), chaps. v-ix.

what—and inevitably so—biased selection and interpretation of this accumulated knowledge. A man reacts to experience with an individuality itself the result of responses initiated by environmental peculiarities. While this individuality of textbooks has distinct advantages, it may become a serious handicap to comprehensive and accurate instruction if only one book is employed; hence the imperative call for a variety of reference and supplementary material in practically all courses. The textbook may serve also as a means of inspiring pupils to will to learn. In the elementary school, especially, one finds that artistically illustrated readers, for example, have a stimulating effect on the development of the will to read. A well-written, beautifully illustrated, and well-bound book kindles the love of ownership, not only of the book itself, but of its contents as well. A lengthy discussion of this viewpoint would lead to trespassing on the topic "the making of textbooks."

The foregoing points of view regarding the textbook are held by most educators and teachers. In a vague, diffident way, also, the pupils may appreciate that the textbook is a source of knowledge; that it is a rather biased interpretation of the subject treated in its pages; that it does seem interesting and perhaps even entertaining. What is needed is to take these so easily adopted attitudes and this half-conscious appreciation of the meaning of the textbook and lift them into conscious aims and methods of instruction and training. By this process habits and ideals may be developed which will fix the pupil's attitude toward books in general.

#### DEVELOPING APPRECIATION OF THE TEXTBOOK AS A SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE

Occasional references to the story of the subject, the romance of its dim beginnings, and the adventures surrounding its growing complexity and wealth of modifications would probably quicken the pupil's appreciation of a particular subject as one vital in the development of the race. In a large number of schools the art department has performed a valuable and beautiful service in the hanging of worthy pictures and the placing of desirable statuary. It would, perhaps, serve both art and the appreciation of the various subjects if pictures were displayed representing episodes in the history of mathematics, science, language, home economics, etc. One week the exhibits might concentrate on mathematics, another on science, and so on. At the beginning of the subject assignments

might be given for the pupils to collect from all possible sources pictures or brief references to the historical development of the textbooks in a particular course. Possibly visits to museums or loans of museum exhibits could be employed for the same ends. If pupils, for example, could see some of the New England primers, hornbooks, blueback spelling-books, the home-made arithmetics, small, almost mapless geographies once employed, they might, by contrast, appreciate the improvements in their own textbooks. School plays might take the form of schoolbook pageants. For example, the manual-training and art departments could construct a large book, with pages seven by eight feet. The turning of each page in science (a rich field) would introduce tableaux or skits portraying a particular historical period in this subject.

It is not assumed, of course, that even with means of the kind discussed all pupils will develop an interest in the textbook as a source of knowledge. But should we not give some attention to this matter? More respect for the textbook may come in this way; but if not, we have given the pupil, at any rate, a peep into some corners of history that are all too well boarded up in the usual courses in our schools.

#### THE DEMAND FOR SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS

The one-book course is slowly giving way to the more comprehensive and more truly educational organization involving the employment of several books. In general science one finds not a few teachers who assign new work in the form of topics, together with title and page references, in books provided by the school. There may be as many as six different kinds of texts referred to. Where the board of education does not supply these books, the teacher requests various groups of pupils to purchase each a different text. These books are then exchanged during the class period as the assignment may require. Similar methods are employed in literature and history.

#### THE TEXTBOOK, A STIMULUS OF THE WILL TO LEARN

Using the textbook as a means of creating in the pupil a certain amount of love for the subject is, to a large extent, a problem of textbook-making, but the teacher at this point may perform a very important task. The newer textbooks in practically all subjects are written in a style that, although not worthy of the name literature, is a close kin to the literary family.

If the pupil's attention is called to some of the more interesting features of the book in the beginning of the term, if the teacher gives a talk on the textbook, illustrating his remarks by referring the pupils to the textbooks lying before them, it may not be too much to expect that such a treatment of the textbook during the first few days of the term would give the pupils a favorable introduction to the book with which they are to work and live for a considerable number of days. The book may not improve on acquaintance, but we have given it a chance to make a good first impression. This sort of inspirational preview lesson is so rare that it may not be out of place to make a special appeal in its behalf in this connection. I have found in my own classes that spending the first day or two in a preview of the book such as already mentioned makes the pupil so familiar with the book that he has comparatively little trouble in finding his way through the various topics, many of which are not referred to in the table of contents or even in the index.

#### THE TEXTBOOK AS A TOOL

The foregoing three points of view, to repeat, are not wholly wanting throughout the rank and file of our teaching force, but the attitude toward the textbook as a tool in the handling of which the pupils need to be very carefully instructed and trained is not so common.

It has been quite generally assumed that the pupil by some intuitive knowledge is able to make economical and effective use of the text assigned him for study. My experience as a teacher has convinced me that the doctrine of intuition is dangerous in the field of study-habits. If the teacher will ask his class the day after he reads this article how many of the pupils know the exact title of the book, the author's name, the publisher, and the date of publication, he will probably find that a very small percentage, if any at all, can give accurate answers to these questions. He will find, also, upon asking, that hardly anyone has read the preface, and if he were to give a surprise quiz on the use of the table of contents and index, he probably would find that the majority of the class would fail to give correct answers.

The facts are that most people who use textbooks begin at the first chapter and read from page to page until the end of the assignment. Much of the material, especially in the lower grades, is memorized. In the high school the method of memorizing and foggy analysis of the contents is all too prevalent.

Pupils assume that, being in the form of a book, with pages and pages of type, the textbook is simply to be read. There are, of course, textbooks with which this method is of particular importance. But what is true of reading in general is true of the textbook in particular. Only as we read with a purpose can we glean clear-cut notions of what we read. This reading with a compass is all-important in connection with the textbook. The pupil needs instruction in all subjects, not merely in the English course, in the evaluating of the material that he reads. He needs training, also, in how to summarize.

Instruction and training in the clear-cut organization of material (an organization that is not merely an analysis of what the book contains) are among the neglected needs in courses other than English. Such organization involves the development of concepts enriched by related material in all courses. "Correlation" has become one of many other hackneyed terms in education. It is far from being a hackneyed practice, however, so far as the pupils' methods of studying are concerned. All too prevalent is the acute accent placed on isolated facts and fragmentary bits of information supplied in the various school "compartments." If the advantage of one-teacher grades could be retained without the many accompanying disadvantages now current in traditional grade organization, much of this concept-building process doubtless could be increased. The project-and-problem plan of instruction has obvious value in this development of concepts.

Other features in training pupils to use the textbook are the encouragement of reactions to what they read in the form of criticisms and associated ideas in general, and skill in the ready use of the index. Perhaps the first thing necessary in this connection is to establish the habit of using the index.

The following illustration of a lesson in this field will make more clear what is meant by teaching pupils how to use the textbook:

1. How many things can you tell me about this book after reading what is printed on the outside only?
2. Turn to the first page containing printing. Read it, compare it with the words on the outside of the book, and tell me what you find on this page which you did not find on the outside.
3. What is this page called and why? (If no one knows, tell the class and write term on the board.)
4. Read the preface and be ready to tell why it is needed.

The teacher should allow sufficient time for each pupil to read. Then the meaning of the word, why the author placed this brief statement at the beginning of his book, and its value to the reader, may be discussed with profit. While this type of work may not have as great significance for the understanding of history in the grades, the forming of habits along this line should begin early. Books frequently are misunderstood because readers do not know the author's point of view. To train the pupil to pay some attention to preface and title-page will prove increasingly helpful as he progresses in his education.

5. Why does a book have a table of contents, and why is it placed in the front of the book?

6. How many chapters does this book contain?

7. Read the titles of the chapters and select the one you think may give us information about the first people who were the leaders of civilization.

Having completed this preliminary study, the teacher now begins a more direct approach to the first study of the subject-matter. The following procedure has been used by the author:

1. Glance at the first page of this chapter, and without reading it tell me what you notice about this page. (Different types of print are recognized. The teacher explains the reason for using these different types, if the pupils cannot.)

2. How many paragraphs do you find under the heading in heavy type?

3. Select the proper names on this page which might be difficult for you to pronounce. (Martin Waldseemüller, Americus Vesputius, for example.)

4. Find the end of the chapter, and see if you can obtain any help.

The pronouncing list is referred to. Explain to the class that some books have this list at the end of the book rather than after each chapter. Also tell them how to find the proper pronunciation if the book has no list.

5. On page 2 (of the text), why are *two* sentences written in different type? Give term for this.

6. Quickly read the three paragraphs under the first topic, and decide whether they are of value to us in collecting information concerning our problem. (Obtain the opinion of the class by asking how many think it is valuable, and how many do not. If the majority of the class have made the right decision, call upon a pupil who is incorrect or uncertain to give his reason; then help him to see why he is wrong. Write upon the board a brief statement of any fact recognized by the pupils as having a direct relation to the problem under consideration. At every step of the lesson, encourage the pupils to ask questions. It is the best proof we can have of definite, purposive thinking.)

7. In the same way, read the next two paragraphs.

8. Consult the small map on the next page for location of the Nile and Euphrates rivers—Egypt and Chaldea. Then locate these two places, with relation to America, on a wall map of the world.

9. Before reading about the Egyptians, question the class to aid them in determining the important facts for which they should look. Some brief outline such as the following should be written on the board before beginning to read:

The Egyptians.—Who they were.

Where they lived.

What they did.

10. Under the topic "Egyptians," decide how many paragraphs or pages are devoted to the subject.

11. When should we make a careful study of the illustrations which a book contains?<sup>1</sup>

ESTABLISHING HABITS OF STUDYING IN THE  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Many teachers who have read the foregoing suggestions may reflect that considerable time is now being devoted to this sort of work. Doubtless much of this work is done incidentally or, perhaps, accidentally. What seems to be needed is a carefully organized series of lessons in this type of training. There must be a conscious effort to give pupils instruction in the economic and effective use of the textbook and regarding other texts that may be used for educational purposes. Considerable attention is given by our educators to economy of time in school work. So far the effort has been confined to the determining of what are proper minimum essentials in the several subjects. But of equal importance is a type of course that gives organized recognition to the need of teaching pupils how to work quickly and also accurately. The amount of time wasted in the class period and in the home-study period is nothing short of appalling.

Doubtless many teachers are loathe to believe that instruction of the type considered in this article has a legitimate place in the elementary school, where the time appears to be all too short for what is now required of the children. Others believe that work of this sort assumes mental development beyond that attained or attainable by young pupils.

Answers to these objections are easily made. With the reduction of the present quantity of subject-matter there will be ample time to form habits of work in the fields referred to. Investigations by Bonser, Stone, Earhart, and Miss Grace Day agree that the reasoning ability of children is more fully developed than is generally believed. The elementary school is the logical level where training in the use of educational tools, of the sort discussed, should begin.

Two factors in this type of instruction are all-important. One of these is the well-trained teacher who can instruct and direct pupils to react effectively to the textbook. Little attention has been given to this matter in teacher-training schools. It must receive increasing and expert attention. The other factor is sufficient money for equipping each class with adequate reading

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<sup>1</sup> MABEL E. SIMPSON, *Supervised Study in History*. New York: Macmillan, 1918.



material. Considerable sums of money are spent on equipment in science, manual training, and home economics courses, and rightly so. A proportionate amount should be set aside for the purchase of supplementary books in generous quantity in order that each pupil may have opportunity to get a broad training in concept-building.

The foregoing suggestions, if given expression in the teacher's plans for a semester's course, might be stated in the following list:

#### SUGGESTED PROGRAM OF TRAINING IN THE USE OF THE TEXTBOOK

##### I. FIRST WEEK AND ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS:

1. A bird's-eye view of the book, noting title, name of author, publisher, date of publication, table of contents, special features of type and illustrations, and general arrangement of material.
2. Art exhibits, showing origin and development of the book. Also museum exhibits showing the evolution of the schoolbook. See Johnson, *Old-Time Schools and School Books* (Macmillan).
3. Pageants and tableaux, giving dramatic presentation of the historical episodes in the evolution of the schoolbook.

##### II. DURING ASSIGNMENTS AS MAY BE NEEDED:

1. Directing the pupil's attention to the outline of contents preceding or following the chapter; directing the pupil in the effective employment of these aids to study.
2. Training the pupil to summarize a paragraph, a page, or a longer section of material, this to be done not only in English courses, but wherever the textbook presents matter that should be so treated. Aim here is training in effective recall.
3. Instruction and training in the effective use of the index as a guide in organizing material within one book or as found in several books. Definite aim of concept-building.
4. Direction and drill in selecting or evaluating material. Inasmuch as this depends upon a rich background or experience in a particular subject, only simple analysis can be expected at first. The pupil needs, however, definite directions in procedures other than mere memorizing of what he has been assigned to learn.

##### III. DURING DAILY REVIEWS (RECITATIONS), SPECIAL REVIEWS, AND PERIODS OF EXAMINATION:

1. Testing the pupil's ability to use the index and his skill in making summaries and organization of subject-matter.
2. Questions on interpretation of contents, evaluation of material (with books open).  
(Most examinations stress memory questions. If abilities of the sort here included are tested, the pupils' progress in attaining skill in independent studying can be better determined than by the usual memory questions.)